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AUTHOR Guenther, Alex
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ABSTRACT

This brochure for educators and parents discusses gifted children, creativity, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The overlapping symptoms of ADHD and creativity are identified, which include: inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, difficult temperament, deficient social skills, and academic underachievement. The possibility of a misdiagnosis of ADHD is stressed and recommendations for teachers and parents are provided. Educators and parents are urged to learn as much as possible about diagnostic criteria for both creativity and hyperactivity, observe and record which conditions intensify or reduce the key diagnostic signs, and ask a disruptive or daydreaming child what he or she is thinking about right after the occurrence. If the child is referred for psychological screening, it is recommended that parents choose a psychologist who either knows about giftedness and creativity as well as ADHD or who is willing to learn. If a child is diagnosed as having ADHD, parents are urged to seek a second opinion, consider medication very carefully, and make a special effort to provide opportunities both within and outside of school to enhance creativity and build self-esteem. (CR)

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THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER

ON THE

GIFTED AND TALENTED

WHAT EDUCATORS AND PARENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...ADHD, CREATIVITY, AND GIFTED STUDENTS

PRACTIONERS' GUIDE #A9814

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E Gubbins

Genius or Disorder?

Young Thomas Edison "asked questions when [the teacher] expected him only to listen, and was not listening when she asked questions," and "had no patience with his classmates. . . . Teachers thought him a problem child and a mischief maker."

Conot, R. (1979). *A streak of luck.* New York: Seaview Books.

The poet Robert Frost "was dropped from school for what we call daydreaming; during some of his lapses from attention he was probably revolving a poem in his mind. Other eminent creative writers, scientists, and inventors have had similar experiences."

Torrance, E. P. (1963). *Education and the creative potential.* Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press.

Leonardo da Vinci rarely finished any of his projects. Although known for his painting, there are only 17 paintings, some incomplete, attributed to him. He defended this "attention deficit" by explaining that his interests were too many and too diverse.

Wallace, R. (1966). *The world of Leonardo, 1452-1519.* New York: Time-Life Books.

Information presented in this practitioner's guide is based on:

Cramond, B. (1995). *The coincidence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and creativity* (RBDM 9508). Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

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What is the NRC/GT?

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) is funded under the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education. The mission of the NRC/GT is to plan and conduct theory-driven quality research that is problem-based, practice-relevant, and consumer-oriented.

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University of Connecticut
The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
362 Fairfield Road, U-7
Storrs, CT 06269-2007
www.gifted.uconn.edu

What Educators and Parents Need to Know About...

ADHD, Creativity, and Gifted Students

Practitioners' Guide - A9814
Alex Guenther

EC 307162

Many of the greatest creative minds of all time may have had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Even doctors aren't always sure who's affected. The definition seems to change every few years, and it has been called everything from *minimal brain dysfunction* to *hyperkinetic reaction of childhood*.

ADHD is something that almost everyone involved with children will encounter. While most researchers agree that ADHD affects only around 3% of the population, it has been listed as the most common reason for referral and diagnosis in children by psychologists.

Parents and teachers of gifted children should be especially concerned about ADHD. A recent study (Cramond, 1995) by The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented (NRC/GT) suggests that many of the symptoms of ADHD—inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, difficult temperament, deficient social skills, and academic underachievement—may also be indicators of creative potential. Many well-known creative persons, including Edison, Einstein, and Da Vinci, displayed the symptoms of ADHD.

All children with ADHD are not, of course, highly creative, nor do all gifted, creative children exhibit signs of hyperactivity. Research suggests an overlapping of the two. Parents and teachers should carefully examine children's behavior for what may be potential talents instead of deficiencies.

Many well-known creative persons, including Edison, Einstein, and Da Vinci, displayed the symptoms of ADHD.

Some recommendations for teachers and parents

When ADHD seems possible:

Since there are similarities between the behaviors of unusually creative children and those with ADHD, special care should be taken to avoid a possible incorrect diagnosis of ADHD. Parents and teachers should learn as much as possible about the diagnostic criteria for both creativity and hyperactivity. All of the primary symptoms of ADHD (inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity) and even some secondary ones (difficult temperament, deficient social skills, academic underachievement) can be linked to creativity. We must realize that these difficult behaviors may indicate special abilities as well as problems. Traits that cause difficulty for children in school situations might be helpful in adult life, when high energy, risk-taking, flexibility of ideas, and ambition may be assets.

When a child seems to be hyperactive, parents and teachers should observe and record which conditions intensify or reduce the key diagnostic signs. ADHD-type behaviors may become worse when the child is given unstimulating, highly structured, repetitive tasks. Therefore, it may help to note when and where the child exhibits these behaviors. Also, ask a disruptive or daydreaming child what he or she is thinking about right after the occurrence. An inattentive or daydreaming child might be bored by an unchallenging environment and could be thinking about alternative (and creative) stimuli, plans, or ideas.

When a child seems to be gifted and creative:

Parents should try to choose a psychologist who either knows about giftedness and creativity as well as ADHD or who is willing to learn. Unfortunately, few psychologists have had training in recognizing characteristics of gifted and creative children. Therefore, a psychologist who is willing to learn about the similarities between characteristics would be preferred. Once a child's behaviors have been interpreted as negative, it is unlikely that he or she will be seen as gifted. Be sure that a creativity test or checklist is completed in addition to the ADHD checklist. In a recent study, 50% of a group of ADHD-diagnosed students scored highly on a creativity test, yet only 21% had been nominated for a gifted program.

When a child seems to be creative and ADHD:

Do not rule out the possibility of a misdiagnosis. Whether a child is diagnosed with ADHD or not may depend on when and where the referral is made. Children diagnosed under one definition of ADHD might not be diagnosed under another. Seek a second opinion.

Recommendations for the use of medication should be considered very carefully. There is reason to be concerned that the increase in attention provided by drugs prescribed for ADHD comes at a price to cognitive functioning in other areas. Also, while medication gives temporary management of symptoms, there is little evidence of long-term benefits.

Above all, parents and teachers should make a special effort to provide opportunities both within and outside of school to enhance creativity and build self-esteem. ADHD can be a negative label that might affect not only the way the child is perceived by teachers, but also the child's self-perception. While most children diagnosed with ADHD obviously require special attention, some may just be energetic and unusually creative kids looking for opportunities to express themselves—and we can't afford to lose their talents. It is important for parents and teachers to bolster these children's self-esteem and nurture their strengths as much as possible, in and out of school.

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